

# Memories of an Environmental Hero

## Paul D. “Pete” McLain

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Photo compliment Lisa Auermuller

Photo compliment Trish Schuster

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In June 2014, the Barnegat Bay lost perhaps its greatest wildlife champion and environmental protector, Paul D. “Pete” McLain. Pete worked in the field of environmental protection for more than 50 years. He began his career with the New Jersey Department of Fish, Game and Wildlife, retiring after 36 years from the position of Deputy Director. As Deputy Director, he was responsible for wildlife research, land management, planning, public information and education and land acquisition in southern New Jersey.

In this capacity, he developed New Jersey’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program (ENSP), the first in the nation and a model for those to follow. Working with Dr. Tom Cade of Cornell University, Pete was directly involved in the reintroduction of the peregrine falcon to New Jersey at a time when the species had disappeared east of the Mississippi from the effects of DDT use. The ENSP also helped re-establish populations of osprey and bald eagle, two other top predator species endangered by DDT use. Pete provided management as well as hands-on work in building nesting towers and in population monitoring. Today in New Jersey, there are over 25 breeding pairs of peregrine falcons, approximately 150 breeding pairs of bald eagles and more than 500 pairs of breeding osprey.

Pete was a pioneer in negotiating funding partnerships with federal, state and private sources for land preservation. He was responsible for the acquisition of more than 18,000 acres for wildlife management and recreation from Delaware Bay to Barnegat Bay. These areas include Great Bay Boulevard Meadows, Sedge Island in Barnegat Bay, Hither Island complex in Little Egg Harbor Bay, Higbee Beach at Cape May Point, Island Beach and additional parcels.

Pete understood the importance of reaching out to the public about wildlife issues, and he expertly conveyed his message of environmental conservation through a variety of media. He wrote numerous articles for *New Jersey Outdoors*, *Field and Stream*, and *Outdoor Life*. His weekly column, *The View Outdoors*, appeared in the *Asbury Park Press* for over 30 years, and he was a regular contributor to radio station WOBN on outdoor subjects. He was also an award-winning film maker, producer and photographer of outdoor movies and videos for New Jersey Network.

Love of Barnegat Bay dominated Pete’s interests even in his retirement. He continued his work with osprey, studied the plight (and blight) of eelgrass beds, co-founded the Emily DeCamp Herbarium and advised the interpretive program at Island Beach State Park.

Pete originated Ocean County’s pump-out boat program on Barnegat Bay, winner of a 2011 Governor’s Environmental Excellence Award. Beginning with one boat in 1998, the program now has six boats that help keep the bay clean by removing sewage from boaters’ holding tanks. Pete was also the founder and past chairman of the Barnegat Bay Student Grant Committee, which funds student research on the Barnegat Bay.

Over the years, Pete received a number of awards for his conservation achievements, including Guardian of Barnegat Bay from the Barnegat Bay Partnership, Environmental Hero from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Lifetime Environmentalist from the NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife, Environmental Quality Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Hurley Conklin Award from the Ocean County Decoy and Gunning Show. Additionally, the Sedge Island Natural Resource Education Center’s house was named in Pete’s honor.

Pete will always be remembered as an environmental hero who pioneered innovative ways to conserve and protect the precious natural resources of the Barnegat Bay.

*We’ll miss you, Pete!*